

Compromises Anger Delegates

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By Mohammad Munir Mehraban and Ezatullah Zawab in Kabul (ARR No. 100, 06-Jan-04)

While there was praise for the work of the grand assembly, particularly in the field of women's rights, frustrations at many of the decisions made and complaints over government interference were also expressed.

Delegate Hashmat Ghani Ahmadzai, representing the nomadic Kuchis, said he was unhappy with the outcome of the gathering, saying many delegates do not fully support the new constitution.

"Amendments and changes which were placed in the draft constitution in the last days of the Loya Jirga were all based on regional, lingual, and ethnic compromises," said Ahmadzai.

Uzbek delegate from Jowzjan province, Engineer Ahmad, said in the final phase of the assembly "we preferred compromise to justice, and thus gave up some of our rights and privileges".

Awtar Singh, a delegate representing Hindus and Sikhs, told IWPR that he was very concerned that there had been no mention of the rights of these ethnic groups during the gathering.

Several delegates have alleged that the authorities placed undue influence on the proceedings. Kabul delegate Dr Muhaidin Mehdi told IWPR that the "Loya Jirga started and ended with pressure from the government".

Gul Mohammad Luqmani from Nangarhar province said, "I am completely unsatisfied....because all our demands remain unfulfilled and democracy was not heeded.

"Delegates were looked down upon and insulted, and the term 'resistance', which we wanted removed from the preamble of the constitution, remains in place."

"Resistance" was a slogan adopted by the Northern Alliance in their fight against the Taleban.

One of the issues that upset Pashtun delegates was that Pashtu was not formally recognised as the national language of Afghanistan.

"It was agreed by the leadership that Pashtu be accepted as the national language of the people of Afghanistan. We congratulated each other. But the following day, Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, the chairman of the Jirga, told us we should give up our demand," said Naqibullah from Oruzgan province.

One delegate from Kandahar, speaking on condition of anonymity, told IWPR, "This constitution has been imposed on us by others and we don't accept it. It has increased tribal, lingual, regional, and religious prejudices amongst people."

But not all the delegates were dissatisfied with the outcome. Nadera Burhan, a female delegate from Mazar-e-Sharif, told IWPR that in her opinion the result couldn't have been better – a reference to the tranche of rights accorded to women.

Khan Sherin Jafari, a delegate from Kunduz province, told IWPR, "Islam has been honoured within the articles of the constitution." He said he was particularly pleased that from now on two women from every province will be represented in the lower house of parliament and that higher education will continue to be free.

Mohammad Munir Mehraban and Ezatullah Zawab are freelance journalists from Kabul and Jalalabad respectively. Both are participating in IWPR's Loya Jirga reporting project.

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